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The Rock of My Salvation

Romans 9:30-33

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CPC 11/12/00

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

As you may have already guessed, the theme for this morning has to do with the word 'rock.' It comes to us by way of the Song of Gathering and the second of the first praise songs, and is a part of the anthem the Chancel Choir just sang, and will be a part of the praise song after the sermon, and is embedded in the final hymn for the morning. Most people probably think of the phrase 'rock of my salvation,' and apply this to Jesus. A big boulder arising from the crust of the earth onto which we can cling - someone who is not moved by the winds and waves. Jesus, our rock.

In the Old Testament, rock symbolizes the security and defense of a steep and inaccessible refuge, that is, a place where God's people can get to, but where the enemies of God's people cannot get to. In Psalm 60, the word is used to describe an immovable foundation. Indeed, in the book of Job, to remove the rock is equivalent to shaking the world. So, in 2 Samuel, God is spoken of as a rock who gives security to his people.

In Isaiah 8, a word for 'rock' is used of the messianic stone, in this case called the cornerstone, who is rejected by the Jewish leaders. Combined with Psalm 118 and Isaiah 28, this cornerstone that is the Messiah (the Christ) becomes important for the New Testament - Jesus Christ, the rock over whom the Jewish leaders stumble, this Jesus becomes the cornerstone of God's true temple, the church. Those who believe in Jesus will not be put to shame.

In the writings of St. Paul, the idea (called 'typology') is continued so that Jesus is the rock whose nourishing water followed the Hebrews as they wandered in the wilderness. You will remember that Moses strikes a rock and water gushes forth to quench the thirst of his people, so 'rock' and 'living water' converge in Paul's thinking about Jesus.

In the book of Daniel, as he accurately interprets the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, you can read of the presence of a rock that has the power to shatter a large statue of iron and bronze and silver such that these minerals become like the chaff of wheat on a threshing floor in the summer and get swept away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue becomes a huge mountain and fills the whole earth.

Most hymns or praise songs that include the word 'rock' focus on the way in which God is a shelter or refuge or someone onto whom we can cling in the midst of anxious turmoil. We need a rock because we are like shifting sand, the kind of sand that is at the beach. Last summer Ben and I spent some time building sand castles on Coronado beach in San Diego - actually, I built the castles and Ben knocked them down. But at one point, he watched a wave come up and flow over my construction, and was amazed at how the corners of the castle smoothed over, and how it all oozed into the ground. I could see it on his beautiful face.

And then, a few days later, we stayed for one night in Santa Barbara, and the three of us took a walk on the beach after dinner. We came upon a previously built sand castle, a mound that looked like it could withstand any liquid assault. We put twigs for flag poles on top, and small stones, and some driftwood, and then watched to see if the tide, which was coming in slowly, would touch our additions to some previous person's edifice. The waves came at odd intervals, but one by one, the monuments we had added were washed away, often accompanied by a

landslide, our proud building with a imperious twig and leaf now being run over by this forward movement of an army called the Pacific Ocean.

I could see in Ben's face both the delight of our task and the realization that the water would win, that we were incapable of holding back the water. And this is precisely what most of us feel in life. However well and carefully we build, we see some wave come by and wash part or all of it away. And so we long for something that will last. Or, for someone who is stronger than the wave that we know will come.

Though we are indeed in a spiritual battle, a true battle with the forces of the Evil One, forces of darkness, most of us don't have the courage to ask for the rock Daniel described to King Nebuchadnezzar, the rock that will smash away the forces arrayed against us. All we have courage to ask for is a rock of refuge, a solid place on which we can stand that will not ooze away. If we are privileged to have such a secure place in our life, we say we will cleave to it - we will cling, stick, adhere, attach ourselves so that we will have some ground that is sure and steady.

I can tell you two things honestly - Jesus is the rock, and most of us haven't learned how to cleave. Although Jesus is the rock of my salvation, and the strength of my life, and my hope and my inspiration, and although it is to Jesus that I cry, although Jesus has been faithful in love to me, and has always been there in my time of need, I have frittered away this incredible gift of grace so often that I scarcely believe any longer that I am capable of being faithful to God. I am so broken I no longer believe the rock is there for me.

I find it curious, then, to stand here, believing in my heart I have no right to stand here, as I try to find voice to remind you that Jesus remains the rock for you. Oddly, it doesn't seem inconsistent that there is no rock for me, and there is a rock for you. I hope and trust you will find the strength to cleave more effectively than I.

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

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